

The Care and Conservation of Your Valued Objects

The following is a general guide to the basic principles of handling, storing and displaying your valued objects.

Introduction

Everyone has certain objects that they value and wish to preserve but unfortunately, time has a way of deteriorating most things. Conservation and preservation are based on common sense, and many of the principles involved are so commonplace that they are often overlooked. The following are a few of these preservation principles.

Storage and Handling

- Handle objects slowly and carefully. Avoid putting undue stress on structurally weak points. Visually check for loose or weak parts before moving an object. For example, handles are often the weakest place to hold an object. Carry only one object at a time.
- When handling paper or textile it is recommended that white cotton gloves be worn. These are available at most photo development shops. Wearing gloves prevents the natural oils and dirt on our hands from damaging the delicate fibres found in paper and textiles. Do not wear gloves when handling glass or ceramics as the gloves prevent a firm grip on the object.
- When moving the object plan your movements prior to picking up the object. Determine your path and ensure doorways and surfaces are of an adequate size to accommodate the object. Knowing how you are going to move and where the object is going to be placed will ensure the object's safety during transport.
- Valued objects should be placed on firm, steady, uncluttered shelves or tables. If objects are being handled it is preferable that the work surface be covered with a thin pad or foam sheet.
- Dirt may contain corrosive elements. Objects should be stored away from sources of dirt, such as fireplaces and kitchens. Gentle dusting can be beneficial if the object does not have a loose surface. Use a soft, clean, lint-free cloth, or a soft brush if appropriate and be careful not to lift off any wood slivers, flakes or surface finish. Since cleaning and polishing always involves some risk to the object, check with experts before deciding to undertake any major processes. Sometimes a patina (a distinctive surface finish acquired over time), or other surface changes accumulated through the aging process can actually enhance the value of an object, and should not be removed. Using water and chemicals can be harmful, and even light rubbing can erode some surfaces. In general, do not attempt cleaning beyond dusting.
- Extremes of temperature and humidity can be very damaging. A high humidity can cause corrosion on metals and mould growth on organic materials. Humidity between 45 to 55% and a temperature of 20 degrees Celsius are suitable for most objects. The worst possible condition is continual or dramatic fluctuation in temperature and humidity, which causes structural and chemical changes in the object. Avoid wrapping objects in plastic, since this does not allow for sufficient ventilation, and moulds can develop.



Jennifer Breckon
Curator
604-231-6461
jbreckon@richmond.ca
www.richmondmuseum.ca

Richmond Museum &
Heritage Services
7700 Minoru Gate
Richmond, BC
V6Y 1R9



- When displaying your objects, avoid strong or direct sunlight and strong artificial light. Fluorescent lamps are especially dangerous because of their high ultraviolet component, as are spotlights because of the heat they produce. Light alters the surface of many materials, fades colour and can cause weakening in the structure of certain materials exposed to its ultraviolet component. Some materials are extremely sensitive to light exposure. Consult the Museum curator if you are in doubt about your display plans.
- When labelling objects, use small tie-on tags. Adhesive labels and tapes, including temporary labels such as Post-it Notes, leave a destructive residue and may stain the object and/or destroy the surface.
- If an object is in need of repair, it is best to seek the advice of conservation specialist first. Many valued objects have been permanently ruined by well-meaning attempts to repair them. Any repairs done should be reversible, in case it has to be redone later. Nothing should be added to or removed from an object that will permanently alter its original form.
- Mounts and display stands should support objects, but should not be attached to them with screws or other penetrating or surface-destroying materials.

Moving Objects Outside the Home

- Remove detachable pieces that could come loose and check for broken parts that may need special care.
- Lift the object by its strongest structural features, never by potentially weak parts such as rims, handles, or tops. Use both hands for support.
- Select a sturdy, suitable container. Wrap the object in clean white tissue paper and then in bubble pack or another padded material. Pad the bottom of the container and fill the space around the object with a packing material such as crumpled paper. Make sure the object is secure in its container that it cannot tip or roll around. It is preferable to pack only one object per container.
- Objects too large for available containers should be well wrapped in a protective padded material such as bubble pack.
- Always carry boxes one at a time, with both hands. Be sure to get help if a container is large, awkward, or heavy and if there are doors to be opened.
- Since dampness will damage most objects, cover the container with plastic in case of rain. Remove the plastic when the object has reached its final destination. Leaving plastic on artefacts reduces air circulation and can promote mould growth.
- Be sure to have a list of the objects being moved and check them at their destination to be sure that all have arrived. Be sure to check all packing materials afterwards for small objects or loose parts before throwing away the materials.
- Great care should be taken if valued objects are being moved long distances or by carriers other than yourself. Details such as insulating the wooden crate, using screws rather than nails to attach the top and properly marking the crate may appear small but are very important.

The Richmond Museum & Heritage Services has many resources for people wishing to do their own research into the proper care and conservation of their valued objects. The staff of the Richmond Museum would be pleased to provide you with further information and advice. Call first to set up an appointment with the Curator at 604-231-6461 or send an email to jbreckon@city.richmond.ca.

The Richmond Museum & Heritage Services and its staff can take no responsibility for the interpretation and application of the information on this sheet, and urge you to seek professional advice before proceeding with any repairs or other treatments of valued objects.